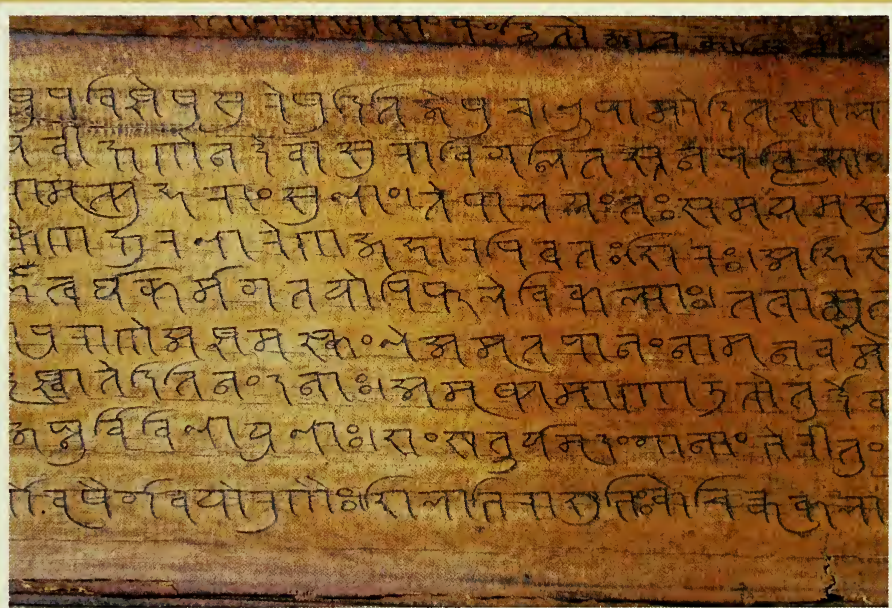
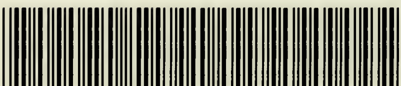
THE WELLCOME INSTITUTE
FOR THE
HISTORY OF MEDICINE



THE SOUTH ASIAN COLLECTIONS

COVER ILLUSTRATION

An inscribed palm leaf manuscript of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. The text is scratched onto the leaf using a metal stylus. A mixture of oil and ink powder is then wiped over the surface leaving the script clearly legible.
Wellcome MS ∊7, leaf 134v. Nandināgarī script, with Telugu style leaf numerals.



SOUTH ASIAN COLLECTIONS

The Wellcome Institute exists to provide library resources and research and teaching facilities for all persons with serious interests in the history of medicine and the allied sciences. It is supported solely by the Wellcome Trust, the charity created by the will of Sir Henry S. Wellcome (1853-1936).

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The South Asian Collections of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine

Dominik Wujastyk

Traditional Medicine and the Literary Heritage of India

India's literary heritage is vast. Her Sanskrit documents alone are numbered in the millions, and are written in more than half a dozen scripts, on stone, wood, metal, tree-bark, palm leaf, cloth and paper. Many lifetimes of work have been dedicated to bringing some order to this profusion, but much still remains to be done. This is especially so in the field of the sciences since the lion's share of scholarly attention has, understandably, been directed to India's religious, philosophical, poetic and dramatic literature. The history of science and medicine in India is still a new field of enquiry. The first history of āyurvedic literature is only now being written. Like any new field, it is exciting: even a little exploration is likely to reveal unexpected facts and relationships. This has been amply borne out by some of the discoveries that have already been made in the Wellcome collections.

The Wellcome collections of books, manuscripts, illustrations and objects from India represent an initiative by Sir Henry Wellcome (1853–1936) towards the preparation of a history of medicine in South Asia. Sir Henry maintained an agent in British India for over ten years, whose brief was to gather these materials and to prepare a history of Indian medicine. With the hindsight of more than half a century we can now see that the time was not then ripe for the latter part of this undertaking, and despite the lapse of years it is still not ripe. Much foundation work must be done in identifying and dating authors and works, in assessing the transmission of scientific and medical knowledge to and from India's neighbours, in classifying plants, their properties and the meaning of their combinations in recipes, and in nosology, before any general historical perspective can be justified.

The sources for the history of medicine in India are the same as those established for Indian history in general: inscriptions, coins, archaeological evidence, literary tradition, ancient historical writings, and foreign testimony. To these one may add contemporary medical anthropology, since India's intense traditionalism has often preserved ancient and mediaeval theories and practices into the 20th century. The Wellcome collections of South Asian books and manuscripts come under the fourth and fifth headings, providing a wealth of literary evidence.

In the first place the collection holds many works on India's indigenous traditional medical system, āyurveda. Many, but by no means all, of these works have been printed, but critical editions are almost non-existent. The Wellcome manuscripts are a vital resource for future editors of āyurvedic works, and some are already being used for this purpose. Secondly, there are works in the related fields of tantra, yoga, lexicography, alchemy, and the astral sciences, all of which have strong medical components. Finally, there is

the medical material to be gleaned from the rest of Indian literature, particularly in relation to the social history of medicine in India. There is much to be learned, for example, from the study of the literature of communities such as the Jainas and the Buddhists, who were known for their medical activities. Epic and dramatic works frequently portray doctors, often throwing amusing light on their social standing. Grammatical discussions of the traditional etymologies of technical terms and plant names can be historically valuable. Such strictly non-medical works are also of interest in their own right, to specialists in these areas. The books and manuscripts in languages such as Tibetan and Simhalese are important both as sources for their own regions, and for the understanding of the diffusion of āyurvedic medicine through Greater India. The collections of modern vernacular works can be expected to shed light on the absorption or otherwise of new theories and practices from Islamic and British medicine.

In short, an understanding of the history of medicine in South Asia depends on a number of different source materials. Due to the wide-ranging acquisitions policy of Sir Henry and his collectors a large number of these materials are available in the Wellcome collections. It is to be hoped that scholars in a variety of fields will make increasing use of them.

Sanskrit and Prākrit Manuscripts

After the Bodleian Library and the India Office, the Wellcome Institute, with about 6000 Sanskrit and Prākrit manuscripts, has the third largest collection in Britain. It is thus amongst the most important Indic collections outside India, and the last to have been made before Indian Independence in 1947.

The provenance and character of the collection

The major part of the collection was put together over a period of ten years, between 1911 and 1921, by Dr. Paira Mall, an agent of Sir Henry Wellcome. Dr. Mall gained his medical doctorate in Munich. In addition to a facility with several European languages, he had a wide knowledge of the languages of India, including Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, and several modern vernaculars. He had standing at the princely court of Karpurthala, in the Panjāb, where he had been chief medical advisor to the Mahārāja, and he became a member of the Theosophical Society in 1912. All these connections would have helped him in his collecting activities. He was based in Amritsar, and bought manuscripts from all over the Panjāb, Rājasthān, Ladakh, Kashmir, Delhi, Oudh, Benares and Calcutta. He also commissioned copies of the more important manuscripts in many libraries, including the Raghunātha Temple Library in Jammū, the Durbar Library in Kathmandu, the Sarasvatī Mahāl in Tanjore and the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library in Madras. These commissioned copies form an important part of the collection, due to the rarity of the works selected for copying. There are copies, for

example, of the tantric *Niḥśvāsatattvasaṃhitā* from the surviving ninth century palm leaf manuscripts in the Durbar library, Kathmandu, and of the medical *Bheḷasaṃhitā* from the unique manuscript in Tanjore. In some cases the original manuscripts have deteriorated severely in the last seventy years, and the Wellcome copies now preserve a more complete version of the text.

Others who added to the Sanskrit collection include Dr. Banarsi Das Jain, sometime lecturer at the University Oriental College, Lahore, who bought many Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian manuscripts on behalf of the Institute (then Museum) between 1928 and 1947. The manuscript dealer and bookseller Bhajanlal, with offices in Amritsar and Bharatpur, also supplied manuscripts between 1928 and 1935.

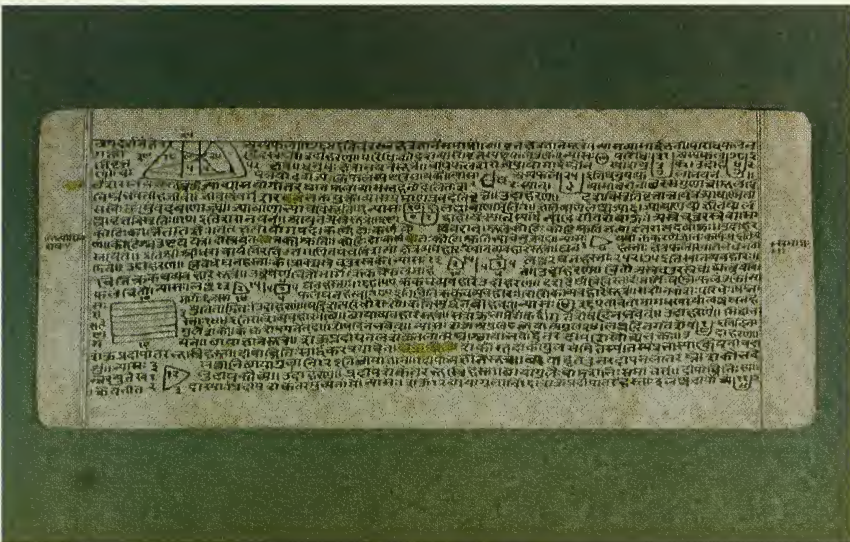


Fig. 1.
The only known manuscript of the mathematical work *Gaṇitapañcaviṃśī* by Śrīdhara (fl. ca. 750). Geometrical constructions are virtually unknown in Sanskrit manuscripts. Free-hand sketches to illustrate the laconic descriptions in the text are more common, such as the small right-angled 3,4,5 triangle to the right of lines ten and eleven.
Wellcome MS α1217, leaf 3r. Jaina Nāgarī script. Bibliography: Pingree 1979.

Amongst Dr. Mall's purchases were over a thousand texts copied by Jaina scribes. Due to these enlightened acquisitions the collection is strong in early Jaina copies of Sanskrit and Prākrit works. Several unique or extremely rare works have already been found in this part of the collection, such as the only known manuscript of the *Gaṇitapañcaviṃśī* by the important eighth century mathematician Śrīdhara, and the rare philosophical commentary on the *Sāṅkhyakārikās* by Māṭhara. There are also many beautifully painted Jaina *Kalpasūtra* and *Kālakācāryakathānaka* manuscripts, as well as cosmographical maps of Jambūdvīpa on paper and cloth.





Fig.2.

An illustrated manuscript of the *Kālakācāryakathā,* one of the most loved works of the Jainas. The story, which has a historical foundation, tells of a prince Kālaka who renounced the world to become a Jaina monk. Shortly afterwards his sister was captured by king Gardabhilla of Ujjain and thrown into his harem. Distraught, Kālaka travelled to the kingdom of the Śakas (Scythians) and encouraged their kings to come and settle in India.

In the right hand miniature Kālaka is in audience with one of the Śaka kings, Sāhi. The king has slightly mongoloid features and a Persian style crown. The eyes of Kālaka and other Indians all protrude beyond the far cheek; in contrast, the Śakas all have eyes within the circle of the face. This is an ancient artistic memory of how the Indians



perceived the different mongoloid features of the Śakas. Kālaka arrived in the middle of a political crisis. The overlord King of Kings had sent Sāhi a sword and a bowl, which he is seen holding. The sword was for Sāhi to cut off his own head, which was to be returned in the bowl. This domestic problem helped Kālaka to persuade Sāhi and the other threatened kings to come to India. From there he urged them to attack Gardabhilla. In the upper left miniature Kālaka throws a handful of magic powder onto a potter's kiln, transforming all the bricks into gold. This wealth is carried away by the soldiers (right and below left) to finance the war against Gardabhilla. King Sāhi, on horseback, supervises. The Śakas conquered Ujjain and freed Kālaka's sister.

Wellcome MS β365, leaves 5v, 8v. Jaina Nāgarī script. Copied ca. 1500.



Fig.3.

The healing goddesses Mahāmāyūrī (yellow) and Śītavatī (green), from a Nepalese manuscript of the *Pañcarakṣā*. The text invokes these goddesses in prayers and spells to combat snake bites, insect stings, derangement, and other ills. Manuscripts of this work, perhaps the most revered text in Nepāl, were used for swearing oaths in the course of legal proceedings.
Wellcome MS δ33, leaves 59r, 97r. Rañjana script. Copied in sam 774/AD 1653.

Paper manuscripts

The bulk of the Sanskrit and Prākrit manuscripts are written in the Devanāgarī and Jaina Nāgarī scripts, on paper. A manuscript of Hemacandra's dictionary, the *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi*, copied in Jaina Nāgarī, is dated AD 1293. This would place it amongst the earliest known paper manuscripts from western India. (Other considerations suggest that it may be a later, but still early, manuscript into which the scribe unwittingly copied the date of the exemplar.) There is also a large number of manuscripts in the Śāradā script of Kashmir, many of them in codex form. One such manuscript, the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasaṃhitā*, has yielded new evidence suggesting a family connection between the two famous pre-mediaeval medical writers Vāgbhaṭa and Ravigupta. Another, a commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā* by Bhāskara, is one of the two, only partly overlapping, manuscripts known of this work. There is also a small group of manuscripts in the scripts of Nepāl, including several illuminated Buddhist *Pañcarakṣā* manuscripts, the alchemical *Rasaratnākara* by Nityanātha Siddha, and the magical *Kakṣapuṭa* attributed to Nāgārjuna.



Fig.4.

Queen Māyā gives birth to Siddhārtha Gautama, the future Buddha. From a palm leaf manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*. The child emerges clean and fully formed from his mother's side, into the red cloth held by the attendant divinity. The sal-tree sympathetically follows the line of the Queen Māyā's figure as she supports herself with one of its branches. The small central figure is probably Gautama immediately after his birth, surveying all the worlds which lay before him 'like a great open court.' The *cakra* or wheel in the text marks the chapters, and also symbolises the forward-rolling wheel of the Buddha's triumphant teaching.

Wellcome MS ε l, leaf 102r. Vartula script. Copied in the reign of Vigrahapāla (ca. 1055–1081). Bibliography: Wujastyk 1984.



Fig.5.

Teacher and pupil, from a palm leaf manuscript of the *Sampuṭodbhavatantra,* a Buddhist tantric work. The teacher is supported by a yellow knee-band. His hands are held in symbolic gestures (*mudrās*). The pupil kneels attentively, the sacred thread across his left shoulder proclaiming his membership of the twice-born class. The figures are finely modelled, and the cloth of the garments and cushion has been attentively painted.

Wellcome MS ε2, leaf 72r. Copied in a ca. thirteenth century Nepalese script.

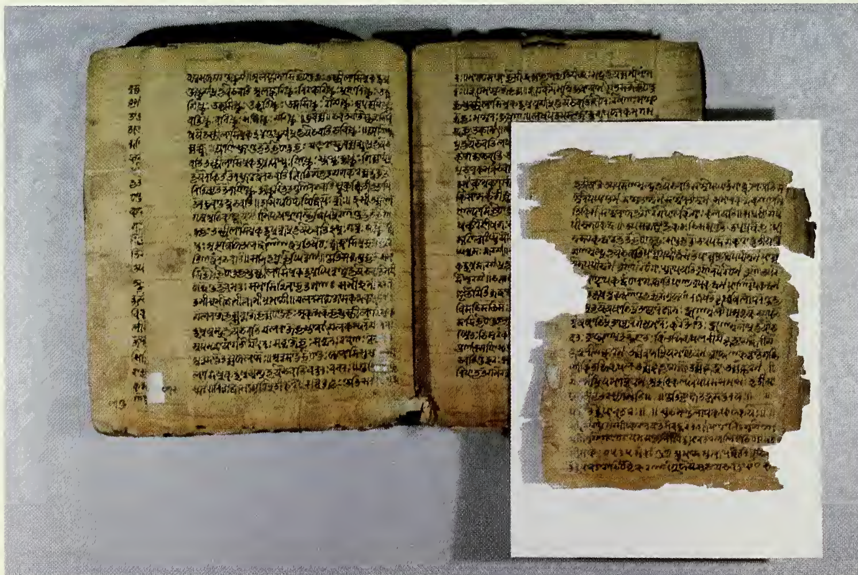


Fig.6.

A birch bark manuscript from Kashmir of the *Rūpāvatāra,* a grammatical textbook based on the famous Sanskrit grammar of Pāṇini. It was composed in the late tenth or early eleventh century by the Ceylonese Buddhist monk Dharmakīrti. The birch forests of the Himalayan slopes provided this beautiful but fragile writing material. The rich colouring of the bark contrasts pleasingly with the dense black ink. The right hand leaf shows the colophon and date of copying.

Wellcome MS δ17. Śāradā script. Copied in śaka 1585/AD 1663.

Palm leaf and birch bark manuscripts

There are about two hundred manuscripts written on palm leaves, mostly in the Bengālī script. These were acquired by Mall during a trip to the United Provinces and Bengal in 1919, and are mainly works on tantra and the worship of the goddess Durgā. There are also works on grammar, epic and other subjects. One of the treasures of the collection is a palm leaf manuscript of the Buddhist *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*. This is dated by its scribe in the reign of Vigrahapāla (*r. ca.* AD 1055–1081), and has eighteen miniature paintings of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. It is written in the archaic script known as Vartula or Bhujimola, as is the undated but early copy of the grammatical *Sārasvatīprakriyā* by Anubhūtisvarūpācārya. A palm leaf manuscript, from about the 13th century, of the Buddhist tantric work called the *Sampuṭodbhavatantra* is graced with a miniature portrait of a teacher and pupil in dialogue. An early palm leaf manuscript of the grammatical *Uṇādivṛtti*, written in a script from Nepāl, is dated AD 1386. The half a dozen or so birch bark manuscripts and fragments, all from Kashmir and in the Śāradā script, include a particularly fine 17th century copy of the grammatical *Rūpāvatāra* by Dharmakīrti.

Previous owners

Several manuscripts bear the library stamp of their original owners. Thus we are able to trace some manuscripts back to the Benares library of Bhaiyāśāstrī Jośī, and others to the library of Badrī Nārāyaṇa Miśra in Daulataganj, Chapra. Amongst the latter is the devotional work *Satyanārāyaṇapūjana* copied in the hand of Badrī Nārāyaṇa Miśra himself, in 1890. There are also three logical treatises, the *Anumitimānasavāda,* the *Avachedakatāvāda,* and the *Ākhyātavādaṭīkā,* which come from the famous mediaeval library of Kavīndrācārya Sarasvatī (*fl. ca.* 1600/75) and bear his or his librarian's signature. Kavīndrācārya, a great bibliophile, was a scholar monk originally from the Deccan. He was honoured in a paean by his contemporaries in Benares for persuading Shāh Jahān (*r.* 1628–1658) to abolish the tax on Hindu pilgrims to Benares and Allahābād. Unfortunately his library was scattered, but its catalogue survives and manuscripts from it are found from time to time.

Microfilm copies

The Wellcome Institute's library also holds a small number of microfilms of Sanskrit manuscripts in other libraries which are important for the study of the history of science and medicine in India. There are, for example, microfilm copies of Nāgārjuna's rare alchemical work, the *Rasendramaṅgala,* from the Bombay and Paris manuscripts.

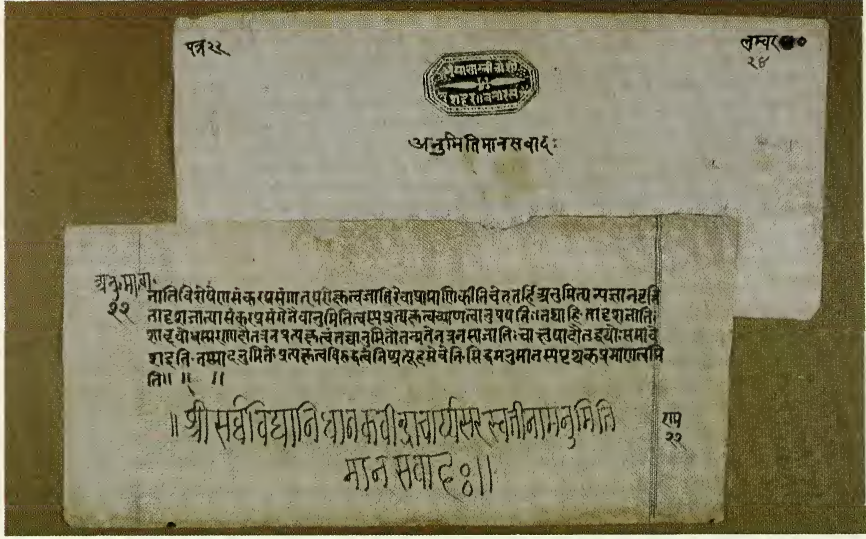


Fig.7.
The *Anumitimānasavāda*, an anonymous work on logic. This manuscript records two important previous owners. The large handwriting on the lower leaf translates as: 'the *Anumitimānasavāda* belonging to Kavīndrācārya Sarasvatī, treasury of all learning.' On the upper leaf the stamp of the second owner reads: 'Bhaiyāśāstrī Jośī, Śahara, Banārasa.'
Wellcome MS β362, leaves 1r, 22v. Devanāgarī script. Copied in the seventeenth century.

Finding aids

Although great energy and resources went into assembling the collection, it proved difficult to find a suitable person to arrange and catalogue the acquisitions. Illness prevented Dr. Paira Mall from doing this work, and his connection with the Museum ended in 1926. Approaches were made that year to Dr. Banarsi Das Jain, then a promising young scholar at the school of Oriental Studies in London, but he returned to a lectureship in Lahore under his revered teacher, Professor A.C. Woolner.

The first step was taken in 1954 when Professor V. Raghavan of Madras University visited the Institute and in the course of a few months (September–November) prepared a list of about 3000 titles. This was a remarkable achievement in the time, and for the first time made part of the collection usable. This list has now been rearranged in Roman alphabetical order. It is necessary to use it with imagination, checking both author(s), title(s), and any other headings that might possibly be used for the work sought.

In 1971 Professor D. Pingree of Brown University began compiling a draft catalogue of the jyotiṣa, i.e. astrological, astronomical and mathematical, manuscripts in the collection, starting with the jyotiṣa manuscripts mentioned in Raghavan's list. This catalogue gives bibliographical details and includes many extracts, incipits and explicits. It also covers the many non-jyotiṣa works found amongst the jyotiṣa titles in the Raghavan list. About a thousand titles have been described to date, and references to many of these have been included in Professor Pingree's *Census of the exact sciences in Sanskrit* (1970–).

Since 1982, Dr. D. Wujastyk has been preparing a detailed handlist of the whole collection, as a first step towards writing descriptive subject catalogues. He has begun by examining those manuscripts not seen by Professors Raghavan and Pingree, and has to date (1984) listed almost 3000 titles. Details recorded include a physical description, bibliographical references, and some extracts, following the recommendations of the *Anglo-American cataloguing rules, second edition*, with modifications.

These three finding aids – Professor Raghavan's title list, Professor Pingree's draft catalogue, and Dr. Wujastyk's handlist – give access to about three quarters of the collection, in varying degrees of details. They may be consulted on application at the Institute's library desk.

It is planned that a unified handlist of the whole collection will be available within a few years, and thereafter descriptive catalogues, beginning with āyurvedic works, will start to appear.

Sanskrit Printed Books

There are at present nearly a thousand printed Sanskrit books in the Institute's library. They are chiefly medical texts with Hindī translations, although there are a number of Tantra and Yoga works too. There are also many general works of poetry, drama, fable and religion, as well as the foundation works of the main śāstric disciplines. The Institute has some of the well known series, such as the Trivandrum Sanskrit series, and the Buddhist Sanskrit Texts series. There is also a collection of about two hundred early lithographs, mainly produced in Bombay. The library has a continuing policy of acquiring books of relevance to the history of medicine in India, as well as essential reference works.

Finding aids

The majority of the printed books has been catalogued and included in the library's general author card catalogue. Many Sanskrit works have also been included in the subject indexes compiled by the staff of the Institute. The library is shortly changing its cataloguing methods in order to take advantage of modern computer aids, and the reader will in future use microfiche catalogues of authors, titles and subjects.

Other South Asian Holdings

There are very substantial manuscript collections in Pāli (*ca.* 150 items), and Siṃhalese (*ca.* 400 items, often with Pāli). The former includes over a hundred Burmese manuscripts on palm leaf and metal. The Hindī collection (*ca.* over 400 items) is perhaps the largest collection of Hindī manuscripts outside India. There are lesser collections in Tamiḷ (*ca.* 56 items), Urdū (*ca.* 15 items), Pañjābī (*ca.* 30 items), Oriya, Telugu, and Malayāḷam (*ca.* 25 items each), Mārāṭhī (*ca.* 20 items), Kanarese (two items) and Kashmiri (one item).

From Tibet there are both manuscripts (86 items) and xylographs (53 items), mostly acquired by Dr. Mall during a visit to Ladakh in 1911.

There is a valuable collection of Persian manuscripts (*ca.* 600 items) many of which were copied or composed in India. The collection includes several lavishly illustrated manuscripts with miniature paintings.

There are small printed book collections in each of these languages.

The iconographic collection of the Wellcome Institute includes paintings, drawings, prints and photographs from India, and a fine collection of Tibetan thankas. These are described in another booklet.

Finding aids

A typescript catalogue prepared by Mr. Somadasa is available for about 70 of the Siṃhalese manuscripts. This may be consulted at the Institute: publication must await the description of the whole collection.

The Persian manuscripts have been catalogued by Ms. F. Keshavarz, a sometime fellow of the Wellcome Institute, and this catalogue will be published in due course.

A catalogue of the Tibetan manuscripts and xylographs is in course of preparation by Ms. M. Winder.

There are plans for cataloguing the other collections, but in most cases this is likely to take some time.

The Wellcome Museum for the History of Medicine

The Wellcome Museum for the History of Medicine houses the three dimensional objects collected by and for Sir Henry Wellcome. Formerly in the same building as the Wellcome Institute, the Museum now occupies new premises on the top two floors of the Science Museum, in South Kensington. In addition to many displays of general interest to the historian of medicine, it has excellent displays specifically on traditional Tibetan and Indian medical systems. Many objects were collected by Mall and others in India, at the same time as the books and manuscripts. They include statues and bronzes of deities, surgical instruments, plant and medicine samples, and many other objects. The items not on display are currently being catalogued.

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